



SERIOUS PHOTO STUFF

Season 1 Episode 8 August 2013



Pentax P3, Pentax-M 50mm 1:2
Fujichrome Provia 100F

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Cover: Pentax P3

Delightfully
SERIOUS
PHOTO STUFF

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In *After Notman*, he made an important contribution to the photographic record of Canada's history. I asked him about that and about time, change, and pain.

Answers from Andrzej Maciejewski

SRS: Before we get started, is there anything you'd like to ask me?

AM: How did you come across my book, Garden of Eden?

I bought a copy of After Notman in Montreal, about 8-9 years ago. More recently I was flipping through it again and thought I'd look up your name on the internet. That's when I found www.klotzekstudio.com and ordered Garden of Eden.

I want to ask you about your other work that you show on your web page, but first I have some questions about After Notman.

I've worn out my copy for a number of reasons. It's an important historical record of Montreal landmarks and street scenes. I'm also impressed with Notman's technical skill and esthetics.

But I think I'm more impressed with your re-photography, especially the extra steps you took to reproduce Notman's efforts. I'm guessing you had to jump through more hoops than Notman did.

What was the most difficult photo for you to re-photograph?

Notman's photographs were taken on 8x10 glass plates. The quality of them is absolutely perfect. He (and people who worked in his numerous studios) was also very good in choosing the point of view and composing his images. They are all of very high aesthetic and technical quality.

I took my photographs on 4x5 film. Yes, I had a lot of challenges with all of them. They were all rather difficult for various reasons. Some vantage points were hard to find altogether, some photographs had very distinctly shaped shadows that I wanted to match and in some cases it was difficult to set the camera in exact matching place (for various reasons). I think the most difficult was the one of the interior of Redpath Museum. Interiors, altogether, were the most difficult. In the case of Redpath Museum the railing is so close to the camera that even the smallest movement of the camera in either direction would change the perspective (and relation

of that railing to the walls in the background). It took me a few hours to set the camera and I think I used at least 10 polaroid tests for this shot. The light in this shot was also rather distinct—late afternoon light coming in through windows close to the ceiling. Like with all interiors, what was interesting is the fact that in Notman's days interiors were lit mostly with daylight coming through windows. That always gave a very nice effect. Nowadays the same places are in large part lit by fluorescent tubes or some other source of artificial light. That leads to rather boring effect. The worst place in this respect was the Notre Dame church. The altar is so brightly lit that it was very hard for me to render all details in shadows and highlights. In Notman's photograph there is a very nice and gentle light from side windows and from a skylight which is now blocked.

Do you think that someone will be re-photographing your re-photography a century from now?

I would hope that someone will rephotograph these places again in around 2100.

You mention something that impresses me about your work: lighting. If you ask me, it's just as important as composition. I find that lighting is hard. I spend a lot of time to get my photos to approach the image I have in my mind. I don't always succeed or sometimes give up when I'm close enough.

In Garden of Eden, where you reboot classic still life, you didn't have the luxury of a canvas and brushes to compensate for bad lighting. You had to precisely light actual, physical objects before snapping the shutter. Why did you use tungsten lighting instead of strobes, or even natural lighting? Is it because it's easier to position the lights and the subjects?

I want to see exactly what light effect I get before taking a shot—strobe has a pilot light that is not exactly the same light bulb that later shines on whatever I photograph.

I grew up with tungsten lights. I used them in Poland when I learned photography and then in Toronto when I was working in a studio photographing architectural scale models. I could never get used to strobes mostly because I want to see exactly what light effect I get before taking a shot—strobe has a pilot light that is not exactly the same light bulb that later shines on whatever I photograph.

Daylight in the case of *Garden of Eden* would be too difficult to control. You know, the sun moves all the time and by the

time I set my table I would have a different light effect. I like tungsten lights (especially with fresnel lens) because they are the best to mimic the direct sunlight. With a simple set of lights I have full control of the whole set up.

Can I ask you about themes? It's funny that you mention architectural scale models. Looking at your photos, I've often thought that you appreciate the technical nature of your subjects. I don't mean that you like to geek out over the specs of your photography gear. Maybe you do. What I mean is that there's a concrete, practical aspect to the images that you create, whether it's the geometry and lighting of re-photography or re-casting disassembled consumer electronics.

Photography for me is a great mix of, let's say, poetry and technicality. I love both and I use both. Some of my photographs are more sentimental (*Toronto Parks, Eastern Ontario, Spaced Out*) and some, mostly new projects (*Alien Civilization, VIP Portrait Gallery, or even Weather Report*) are more technical or let's say closer connected to the reality of objects that I photograph. It has always been very important to me that photography presents in such a clear way whatever I placed in front of the lens. There is always a very strong connection between the object and my photograph of it. And, I am always amazed how a photograph of an object (when it is printed and framed) is very closely connected to the object and at the same time so independent. This

amazes me every time I look at a well-corrected and nicely done print. For example a photograph of potato is not potato at all. On a much larger than life size print of a potato I can see something completely different than when I look at the actual potato. I can also feel something very different. It is almost impossible to look at real potato and think about form, texture, light, shapes, etc. The image of it becomes something new. Something that could not be created without a strong connection to so-called reality but at the same time a new and very different object. This goes the same to any photographs that I take. Even to landscapes or photographs of people. This idea is very unique to the medium of photography and I always remember about it. I am not sure if this answers your question.

You have certainly answered my questions. As a bonus, you've described photography in a way I've never thought of before.

Also, am I reaching too far in thinking that time and change are big themes in your work too? After Notman, Garden of Eden, and Weather Report all show the progression or evolution of tangible things.

Yes. Time and how time changes whatever is in front of the camera is incredibly important to me. The ability to record the passing of time of so very much a “photographic” aspect. No other medium (maybe except for film) can actually show us in such a rude and straightforward way that everything is

passing. Someone said that photographs always show dead people and I agree. When I look side by side at the two images from *Weather Report* that were taken at two different seasons, I can simultaneously feel the coldness of snow and the warm air coming from green grass. I can feel these two things at the same time. With reality I can't do that. All this connects to what I said in the first part. Of course a photograph of the Long Swamp Road on one of the *WR* images is not the real road. But, the image could not be created without the real road being there—so, when we look at photograph (any photograph) our memory or imagination is awakened and we feel that we are moving in time.

**I can simultaneously feel the coldness of
snow and the warm air coming from green
grass. I can feel these two things at the same
time. With reality I can't do that.**

So what came first: discovering this connection between photography and reality, or looking for a connection that ended up with photography? Before you picked up your first camera, did you work with some other medium and, maybe, weren't satisfied with it?

First it was a hobby and simply something interesting to do when I was very young. Discovering the connection between photography and reality is an ongoing thing. It changes with each new project. As I get older I see reality as something different as well. It is not as clear and obvious as it was when I did my first serious series of photographs—*Places and Things* (www.klotzekstudio.com/Places01.html). I was in my early 20s and reality was not as abstract, diverse, or questionable as it seems to be now.

Getting back to photography's connection to its subject. So photography doesn't just freeze time? Have you tried something like stereoscopy or video? How would you say that these compare to still photography's connection to a subject?

In video the object exists (or is alive) for these seconds or minutes. As long as the sequence is. In photography we don't have these seconds of existence. Everything is still and time, in a way, does not matter. I feel that in this respect photography is much more painful because it doesn't leave us with anything that could last. Even for these few seconds.

But photography does the opposite of leaving "us with anything that could last," doesn't it? Can you elaborate? A photograph makes an impression, tells a story, makes an argument, evokes emotion. Isn't that what it gives us?

I meant that the moment that a photograph presents is just a split of time and that makes the image very still and in a way quiet and painful as well. Even something very much alive seems dead on a photograph. Time has passed since it was taken and will never come back. In video it lasts a few seconds or a few minutes (like in some French movies :)). Of course what we get from the photograph after it is taken is very rich and lasts often for a very long time. But the moment it presents doesn't.

What we get from the photograph after it is taken is very rich and lasts for a very long time. But the moment it presents doesn't.

I take a photograph of my wife every few days at the same background of her garden. Each photograph is a bit different and my wife is a few days older on each of them. When I take her picture whatever is registered on my film is already a history. She gets off the chair, we close my temporary outside studio and we go about our daily businesses. The moment is gone and is not going to come back. When she was sitting on a chair she moved around before I released the shutter. That does not show on my photograph. Nothing that

happened before or after is registered. Later (days or years later), when we look at the image we can imagine how it was but everyone will have their own story and most likely nobody will know the true story. In film, it all just lasts longer and we have less room to play with so-called reality. I don't really know much about film but this is what I feel.

Now I understand your fascination with this idea. Thanks for the insight. s^{PS}



PURE PARA GUM, (Soluble).

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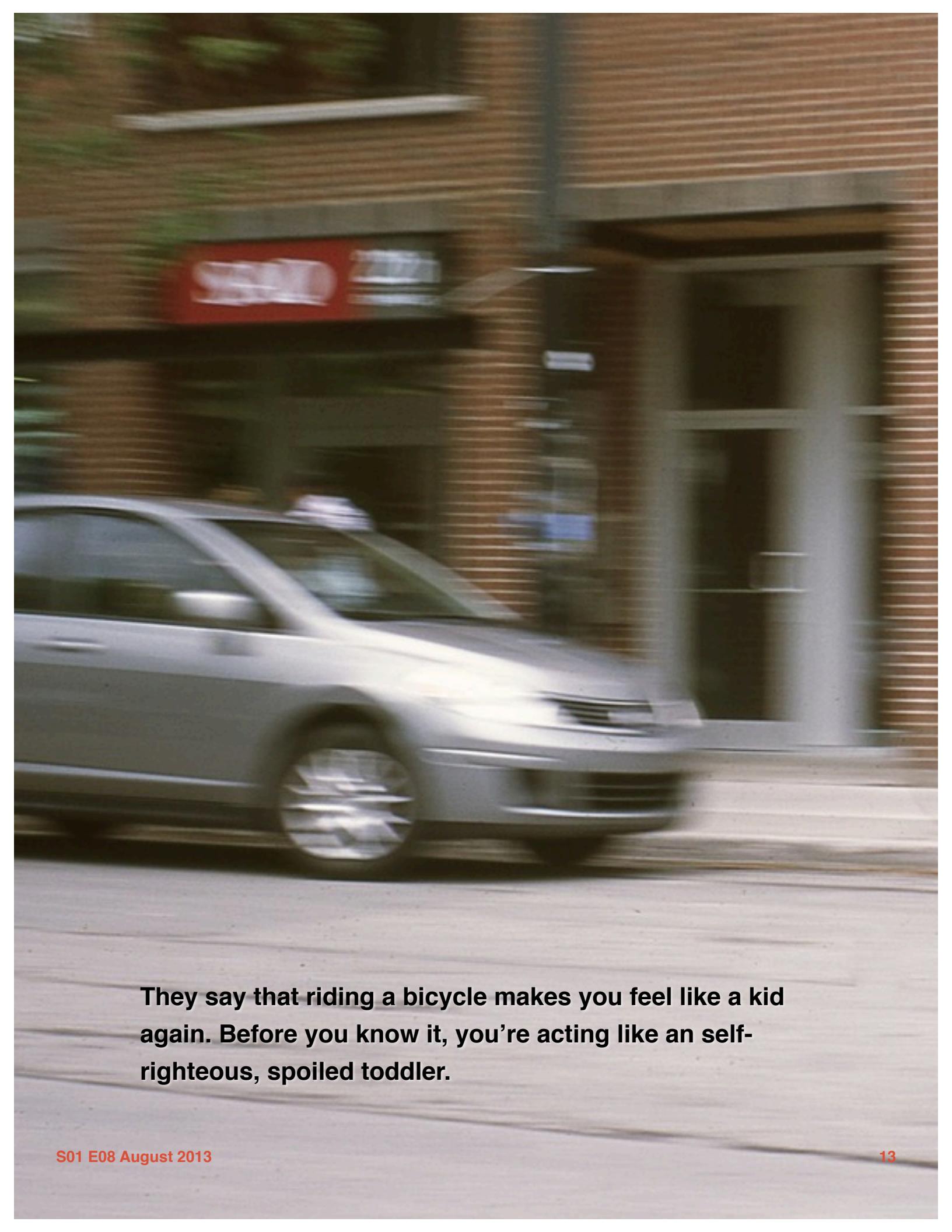
Per package, - - - - - 25 cents.

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They say that riding a bicycle makes you feel like a kid again. Before you know it, you're acting like an self-righteous, spoiled toddler.



Terrible two wheelers



Previous: Pentax P3

Pentax P3

They are everywhere, riding around with a smirk, ignoring our rules, parking wherever they want. If I did that, I'd damage property or even hurt people. They get away with it but I'd get arrested.

They go so fast that I don't always see them. Because of them, I upgraded my new car with the sports package so that I could get the backup camera. I'll never get that money back, thanks to them.



Pentax P3



Pentax P3

Some of them get angry, especially the dirty ones. One time, I almost hit one. But it was his fault for riding so close to me. When he got back up, I saw that he was wearing a stained T-shirt and torn trousers. He said that my car is too big and I should be more careful.

Well, it was more like yelling and he referred to my mother.

Well I say that *they* should be more careful. I work hard to pay for my car. My monthly lease payment is probably more than the price of his bike. Hell, I bet my monthly fuel bill is probably more. sPS



Pentax P3



Pentax P3, Pentax-M 50mm 1:2
Agfa RSX 50

When I asked about his influences and creative process, I got answers about the iron curtain and something called “ZPAF”.

More answers from Andrzej Maciejewski

Now let's turn to your influences. What or who got you interested in photography as an art? You mentioned previously working with architectural models.

It all started like a usual photographer's story—first camera from my father, taking pictures as a hobby, first fascination with darkroom, and so on. It was the same with me since grade 5 or 6. Later in high school it was only photography. But it was all just fun and a hobby. My first contact with a more artistic approach to photography happened when I became a member of Club 6x6 in Warsaw and when I started taking ZPAF photography courses. (ZPAF is an organization in Poland that gathers pros but those with a more artistic touch). I think my big influence at that time was Andrzej

Jerzy Lech, a photographer that I met in around 1982. He was the first who treated photography very seriously and he knew a lot about it. Later we became friends and we are still in touch—he lives in NYC.

I think I gained something unique that I would not get if I grew up in a country that had too much of everything.

In the early 1980s in Poland you really had to dig hard and deep to get to any photographic books or magazines. In Warsaw we had two small libraries that had a good collection of books. One was at ZPAF and it was a reference library and the other was at the Academy of Fine Arts where I worked between 1983-85. As an employee I could take these books home with me. I was very fortunate. I also copied a lot of pages on photographic film and then made small prints to keep for myself. I shared it with some other friends as well. These times and that place were very unique with all that we simply did not have but I think that made me want it even more. Me, and some of my friends, were simply hungry for any resources. I learned so much in these years. And, I still use these skills—making something out of nothing, im-

provising, experimenting. I think I gained something unique that I would not get if I grew up in a country that had too much of everything. I teach a bit at a college in Ontario and honestly I feel sorry for these young artists to be. Everything is given on a golden plate, they don't have to fight for anything. There is simply no wild passion in their eyes. There is no hunger.

What or who influences you today?

My influences change all the time. I always search for new photographers, I always want to learn something new. But, there are some names that "survived" over those 30 years. Eugène Atget, August Sander, Albert Renger Patzsch, Stephen Shore, the Bechers, Karl Blossfeldt, Joel Sternfeld, and many more. These are photographers whose work is in the same sort of style that I would do. There are also some photographers who do work completely different that I would never do but I still learn a lot from their work—Cartier-Bresson, Robert Frank, William Eggleston, Andreas Gursky, Martin Parr, Jeff Wall, and others.

In these last few years I always do a lot of photographic research before each project. For example, before I was ready to start with the photographs for *V.I.P. Portrait Gallery* I searched through all I could find on classic portrait photography. Then, I chose a few names and I closely studied their way of using lights and setting up a model. Later I used the same ideas for my portraits of potatoes. (Karsch, Neman,

Avedon, Steichen, and others.) I do this kind of preparation now before almost all of my projects. I guess that is the influence as well.

So you would agree that constraint encourages creativity? Or do you feel bad that your students can't enjoy experiences like yours when you were starting out? Or is it all relative: you worked with film, but photographers 100 years before you, like Notman, had even bigger challenges. Or is it just that the process for making an image is as important as the final result?

Speaking of gear, you seem to prefer medium and large format film. Do you also work with digital? Do you do your own developing and manipulation with an enlarger or a computer?

The process is the fun part and at least for me it has to be challenging enough so I can learn something new along the way. I am not sure if constraint encourages creativity—maybe for some it does. For me photography is half a technical process and the other half is creativity—whatever that might mean. For me the creative part is happening in my head when I first get idea about what I would like to say and then try to figure out how I will say it. This usually takes a long time, some tests, some reading or research, and so on. After that I have a very clear view of my images in my head. Most of the time I know how I want my photographs to look like. This is what I understand as the creative part of the

process. Next step is simply the execution and in order to have fun I want this part to be challenging. So for me constraints are good. This is also partly why I still shoot on film and why most of my life I used only large or medium format cameras set on tripod. I love the process of setting up the tripod and camera on it, focusing on a ground glass, moving the camera a bit one way or the other. This process gives me time to contemplate what I photograph. When I work in-studio on still lives like *Alien Civilization* this process often takes full day for each shot. It is a bit like building the image until I am absolutely happy with the result. When shooting outside (like my new project *Lisbon - Moscow*) the feeling of “building the image” is similar but it is faster and I have much less freedom. I am restricted with how things play in a view of the camera and I only have some choices. Often when things do not work out well, I simply do not take a picture. These are also constraints that are welcomed.

I did just one body of work with a very small digital camera—*Cold Spots*.

The rest is film that I develop in my darkroom (color or B&W) but I do not print in the darkroom anymore. I scan the negative or transparency and do colour and contrast correction in Photoshop. I print on Epson 24x30 printer, usually on Hahnemühle acid free paper.

I love the process of setting up the tripod and camera on it, focusing on a ground glass, moving the camera a bit one way or the other. This process gives me time to contemplate what I photograph.

I like the same kind of challenge: how close can I get to the image that I design in my mind?

I have just two questions left.

Is there anything you would like to promote? Any upcoming, recent, or previous work? Someone else?

As for promoting I guess you can mention my new project *Alien Civilization*. We are just starting to send submissions for it. I got a nomination from [REDACTED] for that project (and another one for *Garden of Eden*) but I am not sure if it is OK to mention that anywhere. The shortlisting is now in progress.

Finally, how in the hell do you convince your wife to let you take photos of her? My wife is my favourite subject but she's my most difficult.



I am taking a photograph of my wife for a new project—“40th Year”. She is turning 40 in December and for a whole year I take her picture in the same setting and similar light. It is rather her project and I am just taking photographs for her. But, she likes to be photographed anyway. I don’t have to convince her too much. My first two wives were more “difficult”. Maybe that is the key. Experience. :)

Congratulations for the nomination and good luck! I'll remove the name of the competition in the published interview.

Those are all the questions that I have. Thank you for taking the time to do this and sharing your ideas. I'm looking forward to seeing more of your work at www.klotzekstudio.com.

Thank you, Marc. It was a pleasure. *sPS*

Getting old is part of life, if you're lucky. It's also a creative motivator.

New looks at old things

ARCHEOLOGY MONTH

August 1-31, Quebec, Canada

www.archeoquebec.com

PEAK OF PERSEIDS METEOR SHOWER

August 11-12, Planet Earth

SCOTLAND'S FESTIVAL OF HISTORY

August 17-18, Lanark, Scotland

www.lanarkmedievalfestival.co.uk

150TH ANNIVERSARY RE-ENACTMENT OF

BATTLE OF DRY CREEK

August 17-19, Greenbrier State Forest, VA, USA

www.battleofdrycreek.org

SPS